

MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

BRISTLY FOXTAIL

(Setaria geniculata (Lam.) Beauv.)

DESCRIPTION

Bristly Foxtail is a perennial grass with culms (stems) 15-31 inches (4-8 dm.) tall. This plant has short, hard, knotty rhizomes which may reach up to 1 3/5 inches (4 cm.) in length and mostly straight leaves that are approximately 1-3 inches (3-7 cm.) wide. The spike-like inflorescence is 1-4 inches (2-10 cm.) long, appears very soft and has straw-colored to pale yellow bristles which are each less than one inch (5-13 mm.) in length. Plump, less than 1/2 of an inch (2-2.5 mm.) long spikelets or seeds have 5-20 bristles at each of their bases.

SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Species of foxtail grasses, genus Setaria, are difficult to distinguish. Bristly Foxtail can be singled out by the numerous bristles at the base of each spikelet. Pigeon Grass (Setaria glauca) also has many bristles, but it occurs along roadsides and other waste places, and lacks the hard, knotty rhizomes. All other species of foxtail grasses that occur in New England have much longer inflorescences and are annuals, not forming hard rhizomes.



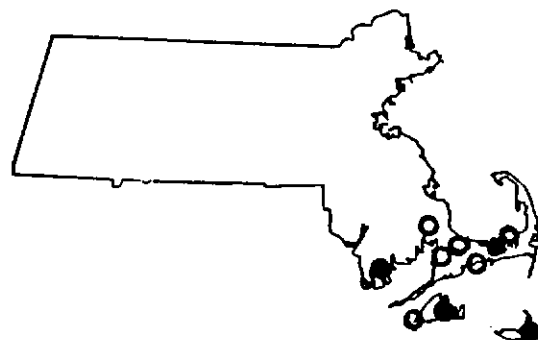
Ritchcock, A.S. Manual of the Grasses of the United States. Dover Publications, Inc. 1971; reprint of 1950 ed.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS

In Massachusetts, this grass is found in scattered colonies, sometimes in linear patches along the upper borders of salt marshes, above the level daily submerged by the tides. Elsewhere in its range, it can also be found in disturbed sandy and peaty areas. Associated species include Panicum virgatum (Switchgrass), Myrica penslyvanica (Bayberry) and Juniperus virginiana (Eastern Red Cedar).



Distribution of Bristly Foxtail



● Verified since 1978
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

(continued overleaf)

BRISTLY FOXTAIL (continued)

RANGE

Bristly Foxtail is distributed throughout the southern regions of the United States. Its occurrence ranges from Massachusetts to Tennessee, Illinois, Missouri and Kansas, south to Florida and west to California.

POPULATION

Bristly Foxtail is considered a species of "Special Concern" in Massachusetts. There have been five statewide occurrences vouchered from 1978 to the present time and 11 historical ones recorded prior to 1978. Reasons for rarity include alteration of habitat due to increased development and the location of Bristly Foxtail at the edge of its range in Massachusetts. This species may be overlooked and consequently, more common than presently believed.